

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: CORNELIA CHIKLIS
INTERVIEWER: SYLVIA CONTOVER
DATE: JANUARY 16, 1986**

**S = SYLVIA
C = CORNELIA**

Tape 86.02

This is Sylvia Contover interviewing Cornelia Chiklis at 15 Jaycee Place in her apartment in Lowell. (C: whispers "215") It's 215 Jaycee Place. And we're going to discuss Cornelia's being, growing up in Lowell.

S: Cornelia were you born in Lowell?

C: I was born in Lowell on the 11th of January 1909. I'm giving you my (--)

S: Right.

C: Yah.

S: So how old does that make you now?

C: Seventy-seven.

S: That's very good!

C: Young (laughs).

S: So you've been in Lowell all these years?

C: I was born in Lowell. Brought up in Lowell. I went to Greece when I was three years old. Came back 1912. When I was twenty we moved to Keene, New Hampshire. And then came back. I was married and came back to Lowell.

S: Can you tell me about your grandparents? Anything about them?

C: All I remember about my, just my grandfather, my mother's father. When we went to Greece he used to put his head on my lap, and I used to fuss with his hair and he'd fall asleep. That's all I remember.

[S: The tape was interrupted for testing]

S: Now we can include the date, which is January 16th, 1986. And Cornelia, we'll go back to your parents. Were they born in Lowell or Greece?

C: No. My parents were both born in Greece. My mother came from Sparta, and my father came from Tripoli. My father came to this country when he was sixteen. He went out west. He had a brother there. He had twenty-five cents in his pocket. And he worked, they were putting the railroad, they were building the railroad. Well he stayed there for some time and he didn't like it very much. He went to New Orleans, then he came here, because in Lowell there were many Greek people, and they said there were plenty of young marriageable ladies. [Laughs] They told them about my mother and he (- -) I don't know if I should tell about the mill?

S: Yes, yes.

C: He didn't know her, so he went, she was a spinner in the mill, the Merrimack Mill. So he stood in a corner and was watching her, and she got aggravated why he was looking at her. [Laughs] So she took one of the, I don't know what you call these cones that they were spinning the thread on, and she threw it at him. Almost split his head open. [Laughs] She was so mad at him for watching her, she didn't know why. Well he ended up marrying her. And my mother came here, just worked in the mill, and then got married and had nine girls and one boy.

S: That's a nice big family.

C: Yah.

S: Now did your mother have friends or relatives when she came to Lowell?

C: She came to an Uncle, and he married her off.

S: When you say married her off, what do you mean by that?

C: Well they had, they didn't fall in love, they made arrangements. That's how they did it those years.

S: I see. Didn't she have sisters who followed her here?

C: They came later. Her sisters, one-sister would bring the other as they worked. There was one sister went to New York, and one in Boston. There were two in Greece. I think there were five sisters, I'm not quite sure.

S: So all the sisters got married?

C: They all got married. They all had families.

S: Because there were so many eligible men here (unclear)?

C: Yah, in Lowell,

S: And a few women?

C: A fewer women, but more women in Lowell than other cities. (S: I see) So everybody came to Lowell and then they moved out. Most everybody that came from Greece came to Lowell.

S: Did your mother work in the mills all her life?

C: She worked when she could. She had a big family. When she could she helped. My father worked in the Tannery.

S: What did your mother do in the mills?

C: She was a spinner.

S: All those years she was there?

C: Umhm. It was hard work. My sister went, my sister Anna went to see her one day and she was shocked. She says, "I didn't know our mother worked so hard." The cotton was all over. They were breathing this cotton. No masks, noisy, terrible. Terrible! They never saw the sun. I remember as a little girl standing at the city hall, and they were coming from the mills along the tracks on Dutton Street. Hundreds and hundreds of people. What a difference from now huh?

S: That all the mills were busy in those days?

C: All the cotton mills were busy. Then they moved out.

S: What mill did your mother work in?

C: In the Merrimack Mill.

S: She worked in the Merrimack all this time she was working?

C: That's all that she, that I would remember that she (--)

S: Did she ever complain about working so hard? And under those conditions?

C: Never. She'd be so tired, being up with the children at night, that the boss would ask her to sit, try and take a nap, and he'd have somebody watch her. I don't know what they call those, the spinning, you know, her work.

S: Umhm.

C: He felt so bad because she had a big family, and if one was sick she was up all night.

S: And then had to get up and go to work in the morning.

C: From six to six. Never saw the sun. And we were supposed to come home from school. No, we'd bring the children to the babysitter, the little ones. The milk, the diapers and the food. Then come home from school. Light the black stove with wood and coal. Put the big tub on top of it so the water would be hot. Then we'd have two tubs to wash, and she'd rinse them out. And that's all that was going on all the time, between washing and (--) We had a big round table with a lamp in the center. There was no gas light then.

S: What kind of a lamp was that?

C: Oil lamp. Kerosene lamp.

S: Umhm.

C: And the little ones would do their book work and we would embroider. Or if we had homework, we'd do our homework. We were all around that table. There weren't lights in the other room.

S: Umhm.

C: Then, later we got gas. And we ironed with the irons on the stove. That's how we heated it.

S: Umhm. That's how you heated the house too? Just with the kitchen stove?

C: One stove. Six rooms, one stove. No steam heat. [Laughs]

S: But you did have a large house?

C: We had six rooms. Yah, we had six rooms, but still we'd sleep two in a bed and the little ones would sleep three in a bed sideways, the little ones did.

S: So who did the cooking then? There was a lot of cooking to be done.

C: My mother did the cooking. My mother did the cooking.

S: She'd have to put on a big pot.

C: Yah, but she was a smart woman. She knew how to manage. If she knew how to read and write today, she'd be some business woman. You couldn't cheat her a penny. She was smart.

S: She had to learn how to handle that money.

C: She knew how to handle us, (S: Umhm) nine girls. None of us went wrong. She knew how to handle us.

S: And were you (--) What did your father do?

C: He worked in the Tannery. He'd come home, have his supper. He'd wash up, have his supper and to the coffee house. The Greek men all went to the coffee house after supper.

S: They didn't do any domestic work?

C: No. My father couldn't put a nail on the wall. My mother did it all.

S: Did he do any of the chores like coal, bringing up the coal for the stove? That type of chore?

C: Oh yes. Yes.

S: That was man's work.

C: The wood and the coal. My brother Peter was too young. He was too young.

S: So that was men's work that he did?

C: The heavy work, yah.

S: But women's work was left to the women?

C: That's right, everything.

S: So all the men went to the coffee houses?

C: Yes.

S: And what did they do in the coffee houses?

C: Sit and talk politics. [Laughs] And they always came home early. And the women knew if they wanted their husbands they knew where to find them. That was one thing that (--)

S: Now did the men have more schooling than the women in those days?

C: Some men did. My father learned to read the paper by himself. That's how he learned the English language by reading the paper. He never went to school. He could read Greek. So he would read the paper, and as the years went by he could read it well. He spoke good. My mother didn't speak too well, but you couldn't fool her, she knew everything. She was smart.

S: Now what kind of work did your father do in the Tannery? Do you know what he did?

C: All I know, they wore big high boots and they were in water. But I don't (--)

S: Was that steady work in the Tannery?

C: Well yes until they closed.

S: Oh, I see.

C: And then depression come on and (--) We have the grocers to thank really, because those years you went, bought your groceries and they put it all in a book. Then you paid them at the end of the week or you had money. So a lot of them didn't get paid for a long, long time. Then the baker would bring bread into your house those years. (S: Umhm) Everyday the loaves would come whether he got paid or not. He never left without. And the milkman was the same. They'd leave the milk and never bothered you about the money. When you had it, you paid it. That was something. Today you don't get that.

S: So they helped each other out? Or actually the business people helped the poor people who didn't have anything.

C: If anyone had to go to the hospital, you'd go to your grocer. He had a horse and a buggy and they'd bring you.

S: Oh, was that (--)

C: There was no automobiles. Then came the automobile. Yah, I remember Mr. Jarvis bringing my sister Julia to the hospital when she got hurt in school. Then we went to the Greek School. That was (--)

S: In what grade? The first grade?

C: Hm yah. See we didn't start school early like now. We might have been six or seven, I'm not quite sure. We were older, (S: Umhm) all of us were. And we went to the first school, the Greek school at the Holy Trinity in the hall downstairs. That was our first school and (--)

S: The church was built then?

C: Yah. But then it was damp and the State stepped in and they bought this house on Broadway, and we went to school there. It was just a little house. Three, well two flights and the attic.

S: Do you remember what year that was? You don't remember? You were probably six or seven you say?

C: Yah about that. So sixty, seventy years ago. It's a long time,

S: Umhm.

C: It was good. We had (--)

S: Did you pay tuition in the school?

C: Yes they paid tuition to keep it up. There was only a hand full of people at that time. Now (--)

S: With all the big family that your father had, was he able to pay tuition?

C: Yah, he made it.

S: Umhm.

C: He made it. And he always said that he'd never walk up those stairs for welfare at City Hall. He was very proud. He wouldn't do it. He went in debt and he paid his debt. Piled up some more debt. And his life was that way until we all grew up and helped. But he never went (--) But we had aunts that helped. They helped us, yah, not financially but in other ways. The holidays they would all come to my mother. They'd bring their food and we'd all pitch in and everybody got together. They were happy times.

S: Well even though it was a large family and you probably didn't have too much money, still it was happy times?

C: We never went without. My father always said, "Maybe I can't dress you well, but you'll never go to bed hungry." And none of us ever went to bed hungry. And we never went without. We might not have had the best clothes, but we were always dressed and we never went without.

S: And evidently you were well fed because you were all tall people.

C: Yes. (laughs)

S: All ten of you.

C: Yah we're all big, yah.

S: How tall is the tallest person in your family?

C: My brother Peter, he must be, I don't know, six three?

S: Umhm.

C: And my sister Mary (--) He was a Marine and my sister Mary was a Wack. She's tall. She's the tallest one. She's his height. Six two, six, I don't know.

S: And how tall [Unclear]?

C: And then Nicki was a Cadet Nurse. So they joined when the war broke out, the three of those.

S: Umhm.

C: They all went to school. Just my oldest sister and I. I went the eighth grade. My sister, my oldest sister was in the fifth grade. We didn't get an education. But we went to night school. Every year we'd go to night school.

S: But all the other children went to school?

C: They all had an education.

S: Umhm.

C: Yah, yah.

S: They all went through high school?

C: Through high school, some went through secretarial school.

S: And some went to college?

C: Yah, Peter did.

S: Peter's a doctor?

C: Peter is an Optometrist, yah, and Nicki's a nurse. Mary became a hairdresser but she didn't care for it. But she's married well and she's independent. She doesn't (--) So we're all married. All the sisters are married.

S: All nine girls got married?

C: All nine girls and my mother lived to see them. My father didn't, but my mother lived to see all her daughters married. All married, good men. Not rich men, but they all have a happy life. Today's standards.

S: That's very important.

C: Yah!

S: And none of your family broke up. There were no divorces in your family?

C: No divorces, no, no.

S: And why is that? Was that because of religious background? Or family background?

C: No. I think my mother, my mother wasn't educated, but she taught us a lot, the values of life. Ah, we were brought up, we saw she was happy, we were happy.

S: Umhm. Tell about when you went to Greek school? What were you learning in Greek School? Were you learning English or Greek?

C: Well we had English, yah. Reading, writing, arithmetic, religion, Greek, the Orthodox religion, music.

S: Did you wear uniforms?

C: We had blue aprons, cotton aprons. The boys too. I remember Mr. Sampson and all these, our age, they all had to wear a blue apron over their shirt and their pants. Boys and girls had the same blue. Light blue aprons.

S: Now Mr. Sampson is the former Mayor's husband? Is that the Sampson you're talking about?

C: Yes, and he was a Councilor in Lowell.

S: City councilor? Yes.

C: And then the Eliades. Mrs. Eliades and Mrs. Contakos and her sisters. We all went to school from the Bartlett later on.

S: Umhm.

C: Oh, I went to the Green School and the Bartlett School.

(Telephone rings - Sylvia says she'll stop tape)

S: All right we can continue.

C: What, about the coffee houses?

S: Yes, about you went to church on Sundays from the school.

C: Oh yah, we went to church from school. We'd get to school and we all marched to the Holy Trinity Church from Broadway to Lewis Street. And those years there were no seats, we stood up. And we sat on the left hand (--) We stood on the left hand side of the church till the service was over. And then every Sunday they'd appoint so many children. There were so many coffee houses. They say, I don't remember if it was exact, but at that time there were forty-two coffee houses in Lowell. The men never went to church. Very few did. The women did. So they'd give the children these little boxes and each one would go in the coffee house, and the men would put their nickels. And that's how they got the money. (laughs) And then New Years (--)

S: They made collections for the church that way?

C: For the church, yah. They supported the church, but they wouldn't go until finally they just closed the coffee houses on Sundays and then the men went. Then New Years they'd have a band and we'd all, all the school children would go in front of the coffee house, sing carols. And the ones that had the little boxes went in and collected money for the church. And they kept going from one to the other. It was great! I loved it!

S: You enjoyed that part of it huh?

C: Yah, I remember that very well.

S: Do you remember any other things from your childhood like that?

C: Well we lived where the Olympia is now, the Olympia Restaurant on Market Street. They're all small little stores, coffee houses. And my Godfather, who was a Justice of the Peace, Mr. Desmarais, who has a son here now, had his office downstairs, and we lived upstairs. And all these ladies that had families, these little apartments were small, but the mothers would get together and all they did was laugh. They were so happy. And they loved one another. They'd just put a cup of Greek coffee and a glass of water and they'd have more fun. As if they spent a million dollars. I remember that. They were so happy.

S: So the women stayed home and got together, and the men went on to the coffee houses?

C: Went to the coffee house. Politics, they had to talk politics.

S: And the women would have fun among themselves?

C: Yes, yah.

S: But when would the families all get together? When the father, and the mother, and all the children would get together? When would that be?

C: Well holidays.

S: On holidays?

C: Holidays, holidays.

S: What type of holidays? Name days?

C: Yes, name days. They celebrated name days.

S: How did they celebrate that?

C: Oh, the mother would make pastries, all kinds of pastries. Course the older ones would help. And all the friends would come. You didn't invite anyone, they came on their own. They knew it was your name day. It was open house. And they'd have beer or wine and pastries and they'd dance. And they never thought that if they lived upstairs that the people downstairs would be annoyed. The people downstairs would come up and have fun too.

S: The people upstairs and downstairs would be Greek? It was all Greek community?

C: Most always, but we lived in apartments where we had French people, we had Irish people. We all got along well. They all had big families and we mixed. I don't know, it seemed (--) And we had, when we lived on Salem Street there was a Chinese man that had a laundry. And the kids would come by to go to school and they'd laugh at him. But um, he was a wonderful man. And my mother, when she'd make pastries, she'd bring him some. He was very lonely for his country. And he used to have these Chinese nuts and he'd give her to bring us. And every so often other Chinese men would come and you could hear them singing.

S: Did they have a family, the Chinese man?

C: They had their family in China. They were all alone and they were lonely people. But at that time the children used to laugh at him because he was different. Today you find that doesn't happen. They just stand in front of the window and call him names. The poor man, held just sit there. It was sad.

S: Was there any conflict among the other ethnic groups?

C: At that time?

S: Yah.

C: Well at that time if you, Market Street up as far as Cabot Street, you couldn't cross the North Common at that time if you were Greek. The Irish lived from the North Common and up towards Butterfield, and Mt. Vernon. No Greeks lived there at that time. It took years to get to rent an apartment or buy a home up above the North Common. But um, the Greek boys used to go to the YMCA and then they'd come to play in the North Common. There was always wars. Rock throwing and fighting and finally they won there way so they could stay and play on the common. It wasn't easy.

S: So there was friction among the ethnic groups?

C: There was, yah. Yes there was.

S: Was it particularly about, with the Irish and the Greeks?

C: Yah, mostly the Irish and the Greek. Greek people lived from Cabot Street down towards Lewis Street, Market Street, Suffolk Street, that end.

S: Umhm. Where the project is now, it used to be Greek families that lived in tenement houses?

C: That's right. Right.

S: Yah.

C: Yah. We had Greek, two Greek druggist. We had two Greek doctors at the time. Then when Mr. Eliades came, we had a Greek Lawyer. Oh no, we had another Greek lawyer. I forgot his name now. He was an older man.

S: Was that Mr. Noukas?

C: Yes Mr. Noukas. Right, yah.

S: Somebody else told me that.

C: There weren't (--) Very few children went to college. They got as far as high school. Those that could finish high school were lucky.

S: Umhm.

C: We had a Greek man who wanted his son educated so badly. To send him to college every Sunday he'd take his hat and stand at the door outside of the church to collect

money to educate his boy. And he did it. He sent him to college and he graduated. Yah, turned out fine.

S: So in your age, during that period, nobody was able to go to college because they didn't have the money.

C: There was no money. The money they made (--) I worked for twenty-five cents an hour. We worked in the hosiery.

S: Is that the first job you had when you went to work?

C: Ah, yes. Yes. We worked in the hosiery. And then, which was, the pays were small. I don't know if we made eleven dollars a week. And then on Saturday and Sunday we worked for Mr. [Parandelis]. They called it the Crown Confectionery at the square across from Brigham's now.

S: Umhm.

C: And in fact his sons had the candy store across from St. Anne's Church. I forgot their name.

S: Was that the BC ?

C: The BC, yah. That was their father. We worked for their father. And we got twenty-five cents an-hour. And Saturday we worked five hours, we got a dollar and a quarter. And Sunday we worked five hours, so we got a. dollar and a quarter. That was so that we could buy a few necessities that (--) We gave our pay at home because we were a big family.

S: So you turned in all your pay?

C: Umhm.

S: You and your oldest sister, or did the other kids do the same thing?

C: Later, later but not for long. Times changed.

S: Yes.

C: But the two, like Julia and I, we were the two oldest and there's only eighteen months between us, so we went to work early. We went to work from twelve years old.

S: Oh, they were hiring people at that age?

C: They were hiring. We were tall, we were big. They never asked you for working papers.

S: Oh I see.

C: This is a long time ago.

S: Yah.

C: It's not now. [Laughs]

S: So those are the two places you worked?

C: Umhm.

S: And Julia too?

C: Yah.

S: [Unclear]

C: And then we went to Keene, New Hampshire in 1928. We moved there, there was no work. My father had no work. So they told him that we could get work in Keene. Julia and I worked seven weeks without a penny to learn a trade. Not a penny.

S: What trade was that?

C: Shoe work. (S: Oh) Top stitchers. But once we learned the trade they paid us. We made more than we ever did. It was a good paying job, but we had to sacrifice, both of us. Imagine.

S: Now did your father get a job there?

C: He got a job there, yah.

S: What did he do there?

C: He was in the, I think he was in the stock room, I don't remember, yah.

S: Did your mother work when you were in Keene?

C: No my mother didn't work, no. But we had a garden. She took care of the garden.

S: Umhm.

C: And we had chickens. So you know, there was work there. And then between the garden, the chicken and the eggs we always had nice fresh vegetables. So it was good. It was nice in Keene, I liked it.

S: And that's where you got married?

C: I got married. No. I got married in Nashua, New Hampshire.

S: Umhm.

C: I (--)

S: You can tell about it.

C: Yah?

S: Yah.

C: I eloped. [Laughs]

S: All right, what happened? Were you punished for getting eloped?

C: No. (S: For eloping?) No, it was depression. My father couldn't afford a wedding. And he asked George to wait a couple of years. And if things, work went good then we could get married, but George was twenty-nine, I was twenty-three and we had been going out for quite a few years. So he told my father, I'm not going to give you my word. If I give you my word I have to keep it. So he just didn't. So we just took off and got married midnight. We got married ten minutes past twelve midnight by the Justice of the Peace. (S: Umhm) And two weeks later we got married by the church, so.

S: Your parents approved?

C: Oh yah, they liked him. It was just, there was no money to do anything.

S: Umhm.

C: If you can't feed your family, you can't have a wedding.

S: True. So you got away with it.

C: That's what did it. Yah.

S: And then you came to live in Lowell?

C: I came to live in Lowell, yah.

S: And when you married your husband ah, what about his family? Was it a large family?

C: My husband, there were nine brothers and one sister, just the opposite from ours.

S: That's what I think is interesting.

C: Yah!

S: Because you were ten girls and one boy, and they were ten boys (--)

C: There were nine girls and one boy, and he had nine brothers and one sister. So my children have the biggest family that I know of. Aunts and uncles and cousins and ah, I had wonderful in-laws. My father, my mother-in-law was dead. So my father-in-law was bringing up the boys. He cooked for them and took care of them and they all pitched in and had to do their chores, because there was no mother.

S: Ah, didn't they move to Lowell also?

C: They were in Pennicook, New Hampshire.

S: Umhm.

C: And then my father-in-law had quite a business out there. And came (--) He had a barroom and a movie picture house at that time. And he owned a lot of property. But prohibition came on and he was, he liked to fish and hunt and kind of neglected his business and he lost everything. So they came here because everybody came to Lowell. And they did well. The boys grew up. They helped out. And my husband and I helped the younger ones. We managed.

S: Tell me about Prohibition. You brought Prohibition up. What do you know about it?

C: Well I remember you couldn't buy liquor, but I think there was more liquor floating around even if you couldn't buy it. Now my father used to like a glass of beer with his meals. So my mother made her own beer. Most of the women did, they learned how.

S: So they made it just for family consumption?

C: Just for the family, yah. Just for the family.

S: But weren't others making it to sell?

C: Well yes! And a lot of people used to get poisoned. It wasn't good. It wasn't better than before because they were getting it illegally.

S: And what do you mean, poisoned?

C: Well, I think from what you'd read in the papers, they weren't making it perhaps, it wasn't as clean, or it wasn't done right and they'd sell it just the same, and maybe too soon.

S: Umhm.

C: And it hadn't fermented or whatever happened. A lot of people used to get sick. Some died from it. Like we have drugs today.

S: Yah.

Tape I, side A ends
Tape I, side B begins

C: Greek fellow that made quite a bit of money bootlegging, but we didn't know him that much. I really wouldn't (--)

S: You hadn't talked too much about him.

C: I wouldn't know. I was younger and, not too young, but still we weren't involved in things like that.

S: Umhm.

C: So I don't know.

S: So you didn't know too much about it in the Greek community at that time.

C: Yah.

S: Was it going on in other communities that you know of? The Irish community, the French community?

C: I don't know about (--)

S: You don't know about that part of it.

C: No. You can see how far we went. We lived on Salem Street and we never walked as far as the gas light on School Street.

S: Umhm.

C: We never went too far.

S: Oh you never left the area? You weren't allowed to?

C: No, because we had no cars. And if we walked we went as far as the Common, the North Common. Walked around, come back. We'd walk down to the Square, shopping, window shopping. That's about all we did.

S: Did you go to dances?

C: Oh yes! [Laughs] Yah, church dances. You had to go with your father or someone older. I'll never forget the time my father took us dancing. [Laughs] You went at eight o'clock and you got home by twelve. So when we got in, the band was just finishing a song and by the time the other song started to dance, we had to go home. Don't, I don't know till this day. We don't know why! Somebody might have said something, but we never saw the next dance. But if you went to the dance they had to ask whoever was with you if they could dance with you.

S: Oh they had to ask your father or whoever escorted you?

C: But if you were doing a Greek dance you could get up and dance. But if you were gonna do a waltz or a one-step, at the time, a fox trot, no man was going to put his arm around you. [Laughs] That was it! They were very protective.

S: And yet all the girls managed to get married.

C: They all got married, yah.

S: Even though they weren't allowed to have a man put his arms around you at a dance.

C: You couldn't go dating.

S: I see.

C: You couldn't go dating. (S: Umhm) They found whoever they thought was right for you. And they checked the families and they get married. And yet they had happy marriages. Even though they, some fell in love and married by love, but the majority just, it was match making.

S: Umhm.

C: And there were a few people that were making money match making, because the parent would approach them to find someone and they did and they married them off.

S: So they were brokers, marriage brokers?

C: Yah, right, right!

S: But that didn't happen in your family?

C: Not in our family, no, no. My parents, especially my father, he'd, we found our own husbands, but he never pushed us to marry someone.

S: Umhm.

C: He knew that we went out with the boys, but he didn't say much, you know. And then when the war came on and my sister Mary came back from the Wacks, she had met her husband. He was in the Army. And she said to my parents, "I'm bringing a boy home ([Laughs] and I don't want you to start yelling at him.)" [Both laugh] And since then they all brought their boyfriend home and they weren't allowed to go free.

S: She was the fourth sister, Mary?

C: Ah. ah let me see. She was fourth or fifth, yah.

S: So from there on the girls were freer?

C: Yah, they were allowed to go out, but not too freely. There was a limit.

S: Umhm.

C: We had to be home 9:00, that's it, if we went out.

S: Now what did you do for entertainment in your early years, before there was radio and TV and (unclear)?

C: Oh we had the old Victrola. I worked on Saturdays and after, let me see, Friday after school and Saturday for Mr. Sarantis, Father John's father. And I remember he had a Victrola and he sold it to me. Whatever I made, like two dollars for working that week, he would keep it so I could pay for the Victrola. But we always danced, always danced. Before we had a Victrola we used to go downstairs in the backyard. All the girls would get together and we'd sing and dance. That's how we learned how to dance Greek.

S: Umhm.

C: They were happy times.

S: So that was where you were passing the time then?

C: Yah!

S: Now in the winter when it was so cold out you couldn't go out, and you had to stay in the house, what did you do in the house in the evenings?

C: Well we'd crochet or embroider. Like I told you, we got around the table, because we only had one stove. And the young ones would read, we would embroider or crochet.

S: Umhm.

C: My mother would crochet. She used to crochet. She sent us to this Greek teacher that taught embroidery. The white cut work.

S: Umhm.

C: So she couldn't afford to pay, so she would crochet lace for her and the teacher would give us the lessons.

S: Oh. So of a barter exchange?

C: Yah, there was no money.

S: Now when did your mother find time to crochet with such a big family?

C: My mother? Well she'd have to sit down. Well we all helped.

S: Umhm.

C: She had a big family, but we all pitched in so she could rest.

S: Because she was out working?

C: Yah.

S: So she sat, her hands were not idle?

C: Never. Never. We all pitched in and helped. Having a big family sometimes is a blessing because the mother didn't work, those years, I don't know now. The mother didn't work as hard because the children all had their chores to do. One would do the dishes, one would sweep the floor. We had no linoleum, no hard wood floors. So she had a long handle brush, a brush with a long handle. And one of us would scrub the floor. It was wooden. And the other one had the mop and picked up the water and clean that floor. And every Saturday night, this is cute, my mother would put the big tub in the middle of the kitchen floor. And we had a couch on the side, and Julia tells us this. The little ones would be sitting on the couch and my mother would put one in the tub and wash them. Then she'd take clean water, rinse them out. And the others would look and she'd dry them up. They'd sit on the couch. Then the next one would come along. The same water, [Laughs] and then she'd rinse them. It's so cute. And then we'd say, "Well I hope the neighbor doesn't come in now."

S: It was like an assembly line huh?

C: Yah, assembly line. That Saturday night bath. No bathtub. There was a little closet, just a toilet. And there was a nail and you just put papers. And it was newspapers and tissues from, the fruit they use to wrap. Today we have all that soft tissue and we complain. Nothing ever happened to us. And they took their bath. We all did! One day I was thinking of my father. We say, "Oh some people have three baths and it's never enough." And I said, "We never had even a bathroom. Just a toilet in a little closet. If your legs were long, you couldn't close the door." And I was thinking, how did my father do it? We were all girls. Nine girls and my mother, ten, all women. And I remember he used to get up 5:00 every morning and he'd take care of himself while we were sleeping and head off to work. Then the rest of us get up, and I don't know, somehow we managed. [Laughs] Course we didn't take showers like today. Everyday you want to take a shower. You had your Saturday night bath! You washed up everyday, but not a good full bath. But I'm glad we had a big family, because today as we are older we love one another, and we help one another. My in-laws are the same.

S: So you still have a good life because you had a big family?

C: Right.

S: Umhm. That's interesting.

C: Well there are big families that don't love each other, but we do. We're very close, all of us.

S: Well that's good.

C: Yah.

S: Now what social activities did you have growing up outside of the church dance? Other things going on with the church?

C: Well at the church there was always activities. But we were, I used to have a class at the YMCA. They used to call it the Girl Reserves. Something like Girl Scouts. Not the same, but something like that. And then I used to take classes, rug classes at the "Y". And we always kept up. We went to night school. We took you name it. We took, making hats, upholstery, slip cover sewing. Whatever they had, every year we took something, cooking. (S: Umhm) So we kept busy. We were never idle. (S: Umhm) Even today I'm always active. I can't sit still.

S: Tell me about the church. You used to go to the Holy Trinity Church?

C: Until they had that split. And my father, of course my father was the boss. What he did we followed. He, I think it was politics then that they got divided. And St. Anne's Church gave us their hall. And we had services there. And then there were more people coming. We had Father [Kosondinates] who came from Georgia. And he was a wonderful person. He got the crowd in. The place would fill up. And when they had

enough money they bought this piece of land right here at the North Common. And gradually they started to build the first floor. For twenty seven years we were there. But we worked hard for the Ladies' Club. Everybody worked hard, not us. We were always active in church affairs, always.

S: And now the church groups, the family, the families and also the young women, the women and the men, did they put on plays and things of that type?

C: Oh, they used to have beautiful plays. And there were festivals at the auditorium, the different nationalities, we took part in that. And then at the YWCA.

S: Who would run these festivals?

C: Ah ethnic, I think it was the International Institute, yah.

S: I see. And what else did the International Institute do? They had these ethnic groups get together?

C: Yes and they had plays. Whatever each nationality did best, they performed. And the church had plays which they held at the high school. They had dances at the Auditorium. Oh, their balls were gorgeous! The church would have these balls. I remember some of the Greek ladies would pay four hundred dollars, we'd hear this, you know? That Mrs. [Kaknas] or Mrs. so and so had bought her gown that was four hundred dollars. We couldn't afford just thinking about it. So they were so elegant, they were very formal, but we managed to go you know, because we were church members and (--) They don't do that now. The kids (--)

S: So there were some Greek families in Lowell who were (--)

C: Very wealthy.

S: Wealthy?

C: Very wealthy. Yah, very wealthy.

S: What businesses were they in?

C: Well Mr. [Kaknas] had the, what? The Confectionery? What did he have? They were making candy. They had the candy store.

S: The Candy Land?

C: The Candy Land. Dr. Stamas. All of these (--) Mr. Eliades got into politics, then finally became Mayor. And then we had, as the children grew up we had lawyers, and doctors, and dentists. You name it, we have everything.

S: So there were more professionals, not while you were growing up, just a few years later. Is that it?

C: The boys and girls my age were just beginning to come out with teachers, (S: Umhm) and then their children all got education.

S: Did they educate the boys rather than the girls?

C: Mostly, but eventually the girls got educated too. But in the beginning the boys got educated. And then the Greek boys all used to gather at the YMCA, and they were very athletic. The church would have basketball games. We all would go to see. Oh I must tell you, I forgot to tell you that at the North Common, we lived on Salem Street, the North Common had movies once a week, at night. And we used to pray it wouldn't rain so we could go see. It was free movies. (S: Aha) The mosquitoes would bite us, [Laughs] but we still wanted to go see the movies. It was nice! And the Common, the people would come to see. And they were good!

S: But they did have the movie houses in Lowell, downtown Lowell?

C: Yes, but this, you didn't pay, you went free.

S: So you could go to these, and you couldn't afford to go to the ones [unclear].

C: Well we'd ask our mother if we could go to the movie. I think it was a dime. And she always used to say, "Well you look on the shelf, and if there's any money you take it and go." She always managed to have enough. So, but we always took it and never touched anymore. She would trust us. But she always had money. And I remember when she, we'd ask her for something that she didn't think we should go to or something, pr she'd say, "Well look on the shelf, if there's enough money." She knew there wasn't enough. But if you (--) Alice Smith had beautiful embroidery. Your mother used to go there. And if we saw tablecloth or pair of pillowcases, we'd say well, "We saw beautiful paid of pillowcases." "Well how much was it?" "Well it was two dollars." She'd say, "I'll give you the money."

But she was smart. That was one way of keeping us in. Keeping us busy. Keeping us occupied rather than, just you know, our mind wasn't on going out or (--) So she was a smart lady, she was.

S: She must have been to raise such a large family and to have all that done so well.

C: That's right. That's right.

S: Can you tell me anymore about the Institute that you talked about (unclear)?

C: The International Institute?

S: Yah, do you know anymore about it?

C: They did a lot of work.

S: What did they do? How did they help people?

C: Well they (--) I remember one time, one of my neighbors got very sick. She had no money. This was depression I'm talking about. And she couldn't bring the doctor. She couldn't afford it. And I called because I was involved in it, more or less. And I called a lady at the Institute and she sent a doctor up.

But they would help in lots of ways, I guess. Course learning to become citizens at that time, they helped. Although not too, too many when I was younger were going for citizenship papers. I think later on they were more interested in becoming (--) Well they were here long enough, they would want to be American citizens. Ah, I don't know.

S: But they were helpful in many ways?

C: Oh yah. Yah!

S: Now, when you were a little girl, did you have to do interpreting for your mother? Did you have to interpret because she didn't know the language?

C: At first. At first. I remember sometimes we'd talk in English so she wouldn't know what we were saying. We didn't pull it over. She knew what we were saying. She pretended she didn't know. She knew. She could do her work. Ah, I don't remember too much interpreting because usually you were always with Greek people.

S: Umhm.

C: Yah. As we got older then we'd get out, you know, more and we had American friends and we'd bring them in the house. And she'd cook Greek food for them and they loved it. When we moved to Keene all our friends were non-Greek, because there weren't any Greek girls our age.

S: But in Lowell they were all Greek?

C: Yah. We were always around the Greek neighborhood.

S: Oh I meant interpreting for instance, if your, mother had to go to the doctor [unclear]?

C: Oh, one of us always went with her. Yah, always.

S: Or any other business as they came up. Like if, to get the citizenship papers. Did your mother get her citizenship?

C: No. I think it was in 1922, I think that if my father was an American citizen automatically she became.

S: I see.

C: I think it was 1922. So she didn't have to. But I went with quite a few Greek people to get their citizenship papers, to the courthouse. To in (--) Well not (--) Yah, to interpret, but to be with them as witness, yah.

S: Was it easy for them to get their citizenship papers?

C: Yah, I guess. I think just one had a little problem. But they all got it. Well they could read and write.

S: Umhm.

C: If you could read and write in Greek, you could learn to read and write English.

S: I see.

C: It was when the first ones that came here, they didn't know how to read and write, especially the women.

S: Umhm.

C: Not all of them, the majority.

S: So then you did a lot of social work in the Greek community then?

C: I did, then, yah.

S: What else did you do to help other Greeks that didn't speak the language?

C: Oh, whatever they really needed. When you were at the International Institute, always something would come up, and they'd call one of us. (S: Oh I see) And I've been to the courthouse to interpret different cases. Ah, I don't know.

S: But you were able to get help for people (C: Yes) when they were hard up?

C: Yes. Yah, we'd go up to City Hall for mother's aide at that time. Yah, mother's aide. Some got it. Some didn't. It all depended on the circumstances. I think I grew up mostly with doing something for the outside of our home, you know. We were encouraged by our parents to do that.

S: So you really were doing social work, helping. You don't refer to it that way, but actually that's what it was.

C: Um, yah. If the time came somebody needed some help, we would help.

S: So all your family is like that? Everybody does (unclear)?

C: I think so. We were brought up that way.

S: You say you were brought up that way. Now with all the girls and the various ages, they must have different personalities?

C: They have, yes.

S: Maybe, you being older had more responsibilities than the younger ones.

C: That's true.

S: And therefore, you were more apt to help other people too?

C: Yah! I suppose, yes. That's true, yah!

S: Because you got into the habit of helping your parents, and then outside (--)

C: Yah. We helped one another in the family and it grows, it's instilled in you to do for others. We weren't brought up to be pampered. We weren't pampered. And we were brought up to help, one sister would help the other. And I think that stays with you, whether it's your own or it's a stranger. If they need help you're gonna do it.

S: Umhm.

C: Yah, you don't stop to think of yourself. I never did. I never did. Neither did Julia. She was that type. Like you said, we were the older ones, yah.

S: Now ah, in the Greek community did they have parades on Greek Independence Day?

C: Oh, we use to go from the school. Oh, we use to do embroidery in Greek School. And the 25th of March was a big day. The Greek Independence Day, and also a holy day. And our mothers had to wash and starch our embroidery. And there was the Associate Hall, which burned down, across for the City Hall. And the teachers would put all the embroidery on the stage. And they would teach the boys and the girls different poems. Then they'd have the band. Some dressed in the Greek costumes, the boys (unclear), the girls in the Greek costumes. And we'd all march to the hall and there'd be plenty of big speeches. And the band would play and (--)

S: Now who was in the band? The school?

C: No, no. They hired bands. At that time we had a, not when I went to Greek school, it was not a Greek band, but later on there was a Greek band. No, they'd hire a band, a regular band and we'd march to the hall. And the hall would fill. And they'd sing the

Greek and the American anthem. The kids would say their poems. It was a happy day. They don't do that now. And then they displayed all the work the children did.

S: Now when you had, weren't there parades in Lowell that the Greeks participated in?

C: Ah once. It never happened again. They had floats. They had floats of the ancient Greeks. They hired these costumes from these costume places. They had the most beautiful float. They got first prize. That was the parade, I don't remember. The city had it, but the Greek people took part in it.

S: Umhm.

C: That was the only time that I ever saw anything so beautiful. They really looked beautiful!

S: Now what else, in the Greek community, that you think would be of interest, that was going on at that time? How about during the depression? Do you remember what was happening in the Greek community then?

C: It was a bad time.

S: It was bad for everybody?

C: It was bad. The churches (--) I remember Father, who was it at that time? The priest used to go from house to house for twenty-five cents a week to support the church. And I remember one of the members used to come to our place. For twenty-five cents, every week, he'd walk up to the third floor. But we enjoyed him so much. We were just married, and he was older and we loved his company. We could have given him a month, for the month, but we wanted him to come. He'd sit and we'd have coffee. Mr. Lambros, he was a wonderful person. They'd come for that twenty-five cents a week so they could keep the church up. Depression was a bad time for everyone. Yah, I hope we never see another one.

S: So you were married during the depression?

C: I was smart. I got married in 1932, the worse year of depression. And I never felt the depression. I had the happiest life. I never felt the depression. Even though there was depression, we were helping his family and my family too. We brought my family back to Lowell from Keene. And we got the girls jobs to work.

S: What was your husband doing? What kind of work was he doing [unclear]?

C: He worked for the Outlet Fruit Company. When we got married he was making \$18.50 a week. And when I had my first baby, a year later he was making \$18.50 a week. And we managed. We paid all our bills. But things were cheap. Things were

cheap. We bought butter, 17 cent a pound. Five pounds tomatoes for 10 cent. I didn't know what to do with them.

S: [Laughs]

C: We were all of just two of us. And on Saturday, Mr. [Babigan?] who owned the place, they'd have (--) They didn't have refrigeration like now. They had ice. So they couldn't keep fruit too long. So he'd say to George, "Well George, do you want to buy a crate of grapes for 50 cents?" So George would buy the crate. We lived in a block. So we passed it out to all the neighbors. They'd bless us a hundred times. [Laughs] And they had fruit and we had fruit. We couldn't eat it all. What could we do with it?

S: Umhm.

C: But that's how everybody lived. They helped one another.

S: So your husband had a steady job?

C: He had. That's why I never felt it. He always worked. He worked for the Outlet Fruit for twenty-two and a half years. So he never was without work.

S: Oh that was good. Now when your parents came back to Lowell did they go to work in the mills?

C: Ah, no. I don't know what my father did. I don't remember. Oh, my father was a shoe worker then. Yah, he was in the shoe (--) He worked in the shoe shop, and we worked. I didn't work too long, but I worked a while. And some of the girls worked in the candy store. Some were still in school. And then let me see. We were in Lowell when they went to war. My brother Peter joined the Marines, and Mary and Nicki, they were, they joined in.

S: So you had three people in the family who joined the service?

C: Right. Right.

S: But in those days everybody was patriotic, they all joined.

C: Yah, yah. And then of course, when they come out, the government educated them. My parents didn't have the money.

S: Umhm.

C: Brother Peter went to Chicago, and he was going for electrical engineering, and they found that he was not fit for that. So that's how he became, he took up to be an optometrist. So he's doing well there.

S: So in the Greek community you don't know why the churches broke up at that time? You were too young?

C: Politics. It was politics.

S: Politics, Greek politics?

C: Yah, Greek politics. The Greeks [Laughs] have to argue over politics in Greece, naturally.

S: I see. The men evidently would keep up with what was going on. They would read papers.

C: Yes, they had the Greek papers. And if you went to the coffee house, you could go crazy. There's battles. The Greeks go to the coffee house to, I guess they're hot blooded. They have to argue. They argue. You know, it doesn't matter if it's right or wrong, they're going to argue the point till they come up with something. But the church, well, some were with the King and some were with Vinnie [Zealos?], and those that didn't want to be with the King split.

S: So it was not religious politics, it was Greek politics?

C: Oh. Greek politics then, um.

S: So now are they, they separated because of politics, but it doesn't make any difference, you can go to any church?

C: Oh you can go anywhere you want. Church is for everyone.

S: Did you go to any other churches when you were young? Catholic churches, Protestant churches?

C: Yah, we went to St. Anne's and if occasion rose, we might go, you know, but I hadn't at that time. The only time we'd go to St. Patrick's, outside they'd have these little parades where they had, I think they called it Confirmation. The little girls would dress in white. So we'd go to see them. It was such a beautiful thing to see. But ah (--)

S: Were you allowed to go to other churches?

C: Oh yah, my parents would never stop us. Never. That, going to church whether it was one or the other, didn't matter. I think they were more broad minded. you know, they were more (--) They weren't that strict. They didn't believe that if you went to another church, it was a sin. No.

S: Umhm. So that you were allowed to go to any church, whether it was Protestant (C: Umhm)?

Tape I, side B ends
Tape II, side A begins

S: You want to go ahead Cornelia and tell us something about the mills?

C: About the mills? The mills. Well my mother worked in the spinning room and the cotton was so thick that the nostrils would fill with cotton. They'd be throwing up. They'd come home throwing up cotton from their nose, from their mouth. Their hair was full of cotton. Some of them would wear little caps to cover their hair. And it was terrible. They worked from six to six. From six in the morning to six at night. And we had some people that worked on other operations in the mill, but the conditions were bad. The conditions were very bad.

And then before my mother stopped working they had speeded up, they called them frames, whatever there. They were speeding them up so they could get more work out of the people. It was terrible. Then of course the next generation they started with shoe shops and dress shops later on. When we were in the hosiery, we worked in the hosiery, they would bring these men and time us. They would time us to see if we were working fast enough and producing enough. Well you could only do so much. You couldn't speed up the machines. And if you had to go to the ladies' room, you practically had to ask their permission to go. It was terrible.

S: This was the Hub Hosiery?

C: Well yah, in the hosiery, yah.

S: Umhm.

C: Why they wanted to speed up the work? But they weren't doing the work, they went by what they were reading.

S: Umhm.

C: Ya, if they sent out to do the work it would be a different thing.

S: Yes. Now was this during the depression?

C: Ah, yes, yah. Well we left in 1928. So around that time, yes.

S: Yes, because the stock markets were in (--)

C: Yah, twenty-nine it crashed and after that, yah.

S: So your mother never complained about the hard work, and her friends that were working in the mill?

C: She would be tired. She would be very tired. But we always helped, you know?

S: But do you, ever heard of other women having difficulties in the mills?

C: Oh yah. Most of them in the early years, most of them turn tubercula, because they didn't eat well. They came here, a lot of the women and men, they would bring a piece of bread, and a piece of cheese and expect to work hard and not having the right food. They could eat bread and cheese and olives in Greece, but they were out in the fields, they were out in the air. They could get milk from their goats. But here they were indoors and a lot of them went tubercula. And often the men, they'd go back to Greece when they were sick. They had no money so they'd pass the hat around in the coffee houses. Make collections to send them back to Greece.

S: Did they send them back to their families?

C: Yes.

S: Oh that was interesting.

C: They'd send them back sick, yah.

S: Did they ever send women back like that?

C: The women went back, yah.

S: And their families back in Greece would take care of them?

C: Yah! But see, they, perhaps some of them weren't strong enough. Their lungs were full of cotton. (S: Umhm) It was terrible.

S: Now when some people died and they had no money, what did they do?

C: Pass the hat around in the coffee house.

S: So the Greek community would bury them?

C: They'd take care of their own, yah.

S: They wouldn't go to welfare, (to get buried through welfare?)

C: No, no. They were too proud to do that. No they wouldn't.

S: There weren't any welfare, Greek people on welfare at that time?

C: I don't know.

S: You don't know of any.

C: We didn't know, we didn't know what welfare was.

S: You didn't know of any people evidently, in the neighborhood?

C: No, no. The Greeks would go to the coffee house and everybody would put what they could. They always did.

S: Umhm.

C: And their relatives would take care of them.

S: So they were always taken care of. They didn't have to rely on the city for anything?

C: No, no.

S: But they weren't so poor that they couldn't afford to be buried, some of them?

C: Yah. And see when they worked what would they get, \$6.00 week? They'd live eight or ten people in one apartment. Like they'd be eight or ten men in one apartment and to save money so they could, well their thought was to save money and go back to Greece. Very few saved money and went back to Greece. They stayed here.

S: Were there a lot of bachelors or men without their families in Lowell?

C: Yah, yah. Some married ones came here and brought their families, gradually, one at a time. They worked, sent money and had each one come.

S: In those days was it easy to bring your family here? Could they immigrate to the United States easily?

C: I don't think so. No.

S: You don't think it was easy in those days?

C: First of all, they didn't have the money, and secondly, well (--)

S: They'd have to be citizens I presume.

C: Somebody'd have to bring you. Like my mother, her uncle brought them. He brought two, and then they'd work and brought their sisters after they were helped.

S: So the Greek families in Greece help each other and they also help each other when they come to America?

C: Yes.

S: And an uncle comes here and he's able to, he would send for a niece or a nephew?

C: That's right. That's how they did it.

S: And bring them here, so they all helped each other out.

C: That's right, that's right. They felt close and they would help one another.

S: During the depression when Roosevelt was elected, how did he have happened to change the country around, to give it a little spirit?

C: Well my father called him the second Christ. He, well he brought the WPA, which brought, gave people work. They were getting \$13.00 a week. We were ten, twelve, we were twelve of us and yet we managed. And then they gave, some of the women sewed at the WPA. They did sewing. They sewed whatever they were giving them; nightgowns and pillowcases, and sheets. And the men went out digging. Whatever they had to do. They were glad to get that much to feed their families.

S: They created jobs for the people?

C: They created jobs, yah.

S: And this was federal money that was coming in?

C: And that started the ball rolling gradually, you know? People got, I imagine that was good for business, because money that people got went to the grocer and the shoe man, and everybody started picking up a little bit. It was a great help!

S: And in Lowell, didn't they have a big parade, the NRA, when Roosevelt came in, and all the mill workers went out on a parade in costumes? Do you remember that?

C: No, I don't remember that. I remember the end of the war, how they all went mad.

S: What happened at the end of the war?

C: Oh, when the Second World War ended I remember it was like a dream. Everybody was out in the streets.

S: This is the Second World War?

C: Um, oh my it was something to see. Everybody went towards the Square it seemed. People (--) My uncle had a furniture store and he had wash tubs outside and all. They'd just take them and keep going, just to make noise. Nobody cared. People would go to the churches barefooted. They had said if the war's over I'm going to walk to church

barefooted. Whatever they had pledged. The churches filled, the bells were ringing. Oh, I'll never forget that.

S: So all the communities did the same thing? It wasn't just the Greek community that did it?

C: Oh yah!

S: Everybody was happy.

C: Oh yah!

S: Umhm.

C: Beautiful!

S: It was a joyous occasion then?

C: It sure was, yah!

S: And every family had children in the service?

C: Who knows. Those that had grown up children yah. Some came back, some didn't.

S: And in the Greek community, there were many who were in the service.

C: And many didn't come back, yah.

S: Yah, so they [unclear].

C: That's how the Mother's Club started at the National Institute. The mothers that had lost their sons across. (S: Umhm) They had what they called the Mother's Club.

S: The Gold Star Mothers?

C: Um.

S: So they were of all the ethnic groups because they all served?

C: That's right, yah.

S: So this was (--)

C: But the Greek mothers had their own.

S: Oh they did?

C: Their own club like.

S: At the International Institute?

C: Institute, yah.

S: I see.

C: I think they still have.

S: Do they? And these are mothers who lost sons in World War II?

C: Oh yah.

S: And they still have the club?

C: Yah. If there's many left now, I don't know.

S: Umhm.

C: I'm not (--) I really don't know too much, but there are still some mothers. And I think some that hadn't lost their sons. They joined that.

S: I see. So the International Institute was good for all nationalities?

C: Oh yah, yes.

S: They provided interpreters for people?

C: Umhm.

S: Do you know anything else about that institution, because they're doing a study. Somebody from the National Park is doing a study about the International Institute. And do you know any other things about it that you could talk about [unclear]?

C: About the Greek people or?

S: Well, anything. Whatever they did for the Greek people I presume they did for the other people too.

C: They do. Like now with the Cambodians and the Laotians. They are doing a lot of work. Helping them out, giving them clothing wherever.

S: Now where the Cambodians and the Laotians now are in Lowell, and people do not like them, they have problems. Did the Greeks have problems like that when they came to Lowell?

C: Oh yes! I think every nationality has problems in the beginning. You have to fight your way, yah.

S: What happened then when the Greeks came? Do you know what happened then?

C: Well the Greek people settled, like I said, around the Holy Trinity Church and on Market Street mostly. And they had the Irish to put up with. Now there were French people, they were in Little Canada. (S: Umhm) They never had problems. But naturally the Irish were here before them. And they felt that, I don't know if they felt they were better, but it's like you're in the house and somebody comes in, they want to take over. Well the same idea. They weren't about to let anybody cross over from the North Common to go up. And then the Greeks were obstinate too. They wanted to get ahead and they were going to push up that way. Eventually they did. But that's like any problem today. We have the same problems with the other nationalities. We have to live with each other and accept.

S: Now in the Greek community, did they have a drinking problem?

C: No, no. You'd find a drinking problem... When somebody got drunk it would be at a party. They kept them there. They took care of them. And even if you went in a barroom, somebody was feeling good, one of his friends, or somebody would bring him home. They'd never let him walk the street drunk, never. I don't know the younger generation, but not then.

S: Well they didn't have that trait, but didn't they have a gambling trait?

C: Yes. Some of them were big gamblers, yah.

S: Umhm. Did they get in trouble that way?

C: I imagine there were arrests, yay. But the gamblers were known for, that they were gamblers, yah.

S: So that did happen in the Greek community?

C: Oh yah, yah. I think it still does.

S: Umhm.

C: It still does. But that's how it is!

S: Umhm.

C: Those that drink, drink. Those that gamble, gamble. They're not going to change for anyone.

S: So you think it's ethnic groups that do these things? That like the Greeks are known as being gamblers?

C: Oh I, no, I don't think so.

S: You don't think it's ethnic groups?

C: No, I don't.

S: It could be others too?

C: Yes, could be, yah. I don't think nationality has any to do with drinking and gambling. If a person wants to get drunk or drink, he'll drink. I don't think the nationality has anything to do with it. As far as drunks on the streets. They'd get together on name days, and they'd drink, and they'd have a good time, but they wouldn't let them go out of the house if they were drunk, or if they did they'd take them home.

S: So the Greeks did the socializing among themselves?

C: That's right.

S: They didn't go and socialize with other Irish, or French, or anyone else?

C: Not at that time, no. But see when the automobile came out that changed a whole lifestyle.

S: In what way?

C: Well, because the automobile, the people that had grown up children and there were two, three pays coming in, they could afford to buy a car. And eventually they could afford to buy a house away from the city, because they could travel and come to work. And they all pulled away from (--) Now Market Street, they're all Greeks. Now you don't see hardly any, except the old timers in the housing projects like us. But ah, I think that's when the change came. When the automobile came out, people pulled away. They went out in the countries. Some people bought farm houses, and they had gardens and animals and now you don't see. Market Street, you'd walk down Market Street, it was all Greek. The grocery stores, the drug stores, everything was right on Market Street.

S: So you didn't have to know the English language? You could live right in the community and get all the services you needed right there without speaking the language?

C: That's right!

S: And some people didn't learn English because of that?

C: That's right, that's right, because they thought they were going to go back to Greece. They weren't going to be bothered. But there were some though, that went to night school. (S: Umhm) The older men. They wanted to better themselves and get ahead. It all depended on the personality. You don't know, each one had different ideas.

S: The men went to night school, but not the women who [unclear]?

C: Very few women. The women weren't allowed to get out of the house. The uncles were protective, you know?

S: Oh I see. Even the young girls couldn't go. I see.

C: Yah, they figured they might go out, get involved and meet some boy, and they didn't approve of that.

S: Umhm. So the young men went to school and got a little education.

C: Yah, those that wanted to. Those that wanted to better themselves, did.

S: Umhm. So the Greek community eventually became very active in the city?

C: Yes.

S: They got into city politics?

C: That's right! We had councilors, we have lawyers, we have doctors, then we had (--)

S: At that time, weren't these councilors, and lawyers and even the mayor eventually, weren't they all born in Greece? Doctors.

C: Well, Mr. Eliades was born in Greece. He was a lawyer. He came here, he was a grown man, and he was born in Greece. He became Mayor. Mrs. Sampson, I don't know (S: She was [unclear]) if she was born in Greece, but Sam, her husband, was born in Lowell.

S: Umhm.

C: So he was a councilor, but she eventually became Mayor. In fact, the only woman Mayor we've had in Lowell.

S: How about the doctors at that time?

C: Yah, we had a dentist that came with Mr. Eliades. He was a dentist. He came from Greece. Now the doctors we had, Doctor (Generalis?) came from Greece. And Doctor Gitsopoulos, he came from Greece. And we had Doctor Demopoulos, he came from Greece. And (--)

S: Doctor Stamas?

C: Huh?

S: Stamas?

C: Doctor Stamas? I think he came from Greece, yah. [S: Speaks at same time-cannot comprehend] So their children now, their children are educated and they're doctors and lawyers and whatnot.

S: Well how about the other children whose parents were mill workers? Aren't they also educated?

C: Yes! That's where it began. The parents worked in the mill and they were, set their mind that their children were going to get an education. They worked very hard. They went without to send these boys to school. And it was a sad thing, because these boys got an education and met girls that were educated, but they were non-Greek. And they married non-Greek girls, and their parents couldn't see that. And a lot of them just broke off from the families. The families didn't want to mix. But eventually that wore off. But in the beginning it was terrible. It happened to us, because my brother married a non-Greek girl. And my uncle says to him, "Don't, when he comes to Lowell don't leave him in the house."

S: Oh!

C: And I said, "He's my brother and he's coming into my house. I don't care what you do." But my father, he felt very bad, but he accepted the girl. But before that I think it was the religion that bothered him. And then of course these boys got an education and they wanted an educated woman too. But as the years went by, the Greek girls got educated too. So it worked out. Now we have, you name it, we have everything. We have lawyers and doctors, and they're all going to college, improving themselves. And they're good citizens and I think that's good for the country too.

S: Aren't there many Greek young men who left Lowell and went on to be doctors, and have gone to other parts of the country, from Lowell?

C: Yah!

S: Many professionals started out in Lowell and have left.

C: Yes. Yah. Yah. Now we have the Greek paper, The Hellenic Chronicle. It's amazing, I get it every week. When I see how many Greek professionals that we have, that they're all over the country. That are doing wonderful, wonderful things.

S: They came from Lowell and their parents were mill workers.

C: Some did. Some did, yes. Well that's where it stems, from Lowell. Everybody came to Lowell. That's the beginning.

S: So you think all the Greek families originated in Lowell? [Laughs]

C: Yes. You go out west sometimes, and the people will meet someone and they'd say, "Well I went to Lowell when I first came from Greece."

S: Oh, I see.

C: They may not have stayed long, but they came to Lowell.

S: I see.

C: My father-in-law was the same. He came to Lowell, and a lot of the old timers came to Lowell first.

S: That's interesting, because it was a Greek community here.

C: Right. They had gathered in one place. And they had started grocery stores, and the drug stores, and they had even (--) What did they have? You could go and borrow money. A loan, what do they call it? A loan place where they could borrow money from a bank? These people were the beginners.

S: So there were some enterprising men that came here to start their businesses?

C: Yes. Yes.

S: In the Greek community. There were all types of businesses.

C: Yes! Now we are the first children from immigrant parents born in this country.

S: Umhm.

C: Now my son was in the Reserves, and the officer said to him one day, "You're the first man I have that has been born from American born parents, both parents."

S: Oh really?

C: Because my husband was born in this country and I was. Now my daughter married a boy from Greece. So her children are not full Americans. So he, my son was surprised. He couldn't, never thought of it, really. But you still get the mix marriages. With, not mixed, but coming from Greece marrying American girls, or the other way around.

S: Umhm.

C: So, I never gave that a thought that they check that, you know. Isn't it something?

S: Umhm.

C: Yah.

S: So now your daughter being married to a Greek man, does she keep the customs, the Greek customs the way you do? The way you have kept them?

C: Mostly, mostly.

S: Mostly?

C: Yah, mostly, not strict, yah.

S: Yah, but she has the traditions. Just all the traditions.

C: Yes. Yes, yah.

S: And her daughter will be following traditions also?

C: Not as strict, but yah we do more or less. Yah, not like years ago.

S: Umhm. But take the best from both societies?

C: Yah. Right, right. Yah, and you learn from each other. Now the children and the grandchildren have gone to Greece. They speak Greek. They read and write Greek, which is nice, because when they went there they could speak. You know, their grandparents in Greece.

S: Well that's interesting. Now that's the third generation born in the United States and they can still speak Greek.

C: Yes. I'm one, my daughter, yes, yes. My children went to Greek school. In the afternoon after the English school, they would go to the church in the afternoon and get their Greek.

S: So they read and write it that way, not only speak it?

C: They read and write.

S: Did you speak it at home? Is that how they picked it up?

C: No, no. Very little at home.

S: So where did they pick it up? With the grandmother?

C: In church.

S: And with their grandmother?

C: From me you mean? No. In Greece?

S: No. Your children (C: yes) speak Greek. (C: Yes) How did they pick it up? If you didn't speak it at home with your husband (--)

C: We, very little at home. Well when they went to Greek school, they come home, they had their lessons.

S: I see.

C: And then we congregate, you know, people talk.

S: Umhm.

C: They can read. My daughter can write beautiful Greek. Better than her husband who was born in Greece. So you see, and the children learn how to read and write in church. After their American school they go to Greek school.

S: Umhm. So that means many families are still doing that?

C: Right.

S: So that's still keeping the Greek language (C: Umhm) the Greek tradition.

C: Umhm. And in church, in church you ah, you're bound to, you mix with the people in church. They talk Greek and English. We mix it.

S: Umhm.

C: That's the trouble. We don't keep one. I didn't speak Greek with my husband, very little. He didn't know how to speak Greek. Eventually he learned. You do it unconsciously, you know. So we talked both languages. I remember taking my daughter to this English couple, they had a camp in Westford. And she was about five or four. So I talked to her in Greek. This is an old couple now, Yankees, and they asked us to visit.

The husband worked with my husband. So I talked to my daughter in Greek and I talked to her in English without thinking. And they said, "Isn't it wonderful, a little girl like that can talk two languages and all we can talk is one." But I think you do it without thinking. It depends. I talked Greek to her and then I turned around and talked English. I don't put my mind to it, to say, I'm gonna talk Greek to her. It just happens that way.

S: Do you consider yourself a Greek or an American?

C: Well you know, a little bit of both. More American, and I'm proud to be Greek. Very proud to be Greek. But this is my country. I was born, I was brought up here. If I had to choose, I'd hate to have to choose, but this is my country. I was born here. I love it. And Greece I know from history, what I learned in history.

S: Because you haven't, you went back as a youngster?

C: Yah!

S: But you don't remember it?

C: No. Very little. No.

S: But you have the ties to Greece because of your parents?

C: I have Greek blood in me, yah. I can't deny that.

S: Now do you think all Greeks feel the same way?

C: About being more American?

S: I mean the Greek Americans feel the same way?

C: Who knows, who knows. Each one is their own, but I was never ashamed to be Greek. Never. And I never will be because I'm proud that I'm Greek. And I'm proud that I'm American. I love it!

S: Now is there anything else about the Greek community that you think might be interesting for the National Park to know? Can you think of anything? Let's take a break for awhile and think about it.

C: Um.

S: All right Cornelia why don't you continue.

C: I'm in the apartment for the elderly and I look out of my window and I see the church, our church that I belong to.

S: What's the name of the church?

C: It's the Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church. And every Tuesday we have a work group of elderly ladies. We started from twelve, now we're about forty-five ladies go there every week. First of all, we have lots of fun getting together, but we do a lot of work. We're preparing for our festival that we have every two years. The women do quilting, they crochet, they knit. And now we are cutting aprons that the ladies will sew. There's projects. Every table has a different project. And we have coffee and lunch and enjoy it. Our Philoptochos, which means a friend of the poor...

S: That's a women's organization?

C: That's the ladies' organization in church. We have a meeting once a month. And they do so much. They visit the nursing homes three times a year. They bring gifts. And they have what they call the "Out Reach Program," that they help non-Greek people as well as Greek people. Then they help St. Anne's who feeds people who need to be fed. They spend \$200.00 each day. St. Anne's feeds them. And we've helped them twice. And I think if they're in need again they will help. They, anything that comes up that anyone needs. Now if anyone was to pass away in a nursing home that has no family, they will get in touch and bury them. They do a lot of Philanthropic work. They help in any way. Anyone needs help, they will help them.

S: Didn't they send in clothing to Africa before the famine? (C: They sent) How many years have they been (--)

C: They've sent clothes to Africa, Alaska and the Indian Reservation. The Indian Reservation had asked for help, and they sent them clothing. Any help that is asked, they will do. And they spend quite a bit of money doing good. They're working very hard, but they're accomplishing a lot.

S: What else do they do in the church here? Are there other organizations here?

C: Well they have the men's club that is doing a lot. That's a new organization, started last year, which is very good. Then the youth have (--)

S: What do the men do?

C: Well the men have been having suppers. And what they've done so far is mostly for the church itself.

S: Umhm.

C: Eventually they will spread out.

Tape II side A ends

Tape II side B begins

C: It's called (Gloria). They're young girls and boys that they get together, and it's nice because they get acquainted. And they're not doing so much philanthropic work as much as meeting and enjoying themselves as a group. They have little dances. Then they run cake sales. The idea is to get the youth together and meet one another. Some of them have married. They've gotten to know and like each other well, which is a nice thing.

S: Do they go to retreats?

C: They have retreat. That's something that the Archbishop has started, which is nice. Then they have the camp for underprivileged children, and the ladies club gives two children, they sponsor two children. And the church members, the board sponsors two children. The men's club sponsors one child, because they're new and they don't have too much money. So it's a very nice thing. They spend two weeks at camp.

S: Are there any scholarships for the young people?

C: The Ladies Philoptochos gives scholarships. They give, let's see, two. The Philoptochos gives two, three. The board gives two. Helen George's brother gives one. The Tavalaris family gives one. So they, they give quite a bit for scholarships.

S: They encourage them to go to college?

C: They encourage them. And then they have one, the Philoptochos gives to any boy that will go to the Seminary to be a priest. They give them \$300.00 a year to help them. They're doing quite a bit of work.

S: And you're very active in the Ladies Philoptochos Society?

C: Well I've been active since I was a young girl, about fourteen or fifteen years old. I've been with the church since they built it. Not since they built it, since they separated from the Holy Trinity. Our family went to that church and we've been going ever since.

S: So now that you live just up, right across from the church, it makes you happy?

C: I love it! I'm very happy! I love it! In fact the people in the building gives us a key and we go through the gate right to the church. We don't have to go around. It's wonderful. I love it!

S: So you can also oversee the church. Just look out the window and see that everything is fine.

C: Yes. Everything we, we take care of the church. We watch that nobody does any damage. [Laughs] It's nice. When I came here and I looked out the window, I saw the church. I says, "Oh I'm taking it." The apartment I mean.

S: And this is a lovely apartment.

C: It's nice.

S: It's a three room apartment. It's very modern.

C: Yes, comfortable. I love it here. I love it!

S: Now when you can't go to church because you have a problem with your hip, right, you just look out the window and feel comforted?

C: Yes! And on Tuesday, if I can't walk, because on account of my hip, they send a car and they pick us up and they bring us back.

S: Even though it's a short distance?

C: Yes, even though it's a (--) They know that I can't walk.

S: I see.

C: And so they'll pick my sister and I and bring us both ways.

S: That's wonderful!

C: Yah, yah.

S: And you have a sister in this building, which makes it nice.

C: I have my oldest sister with her husband in the building. It's very nice here.

S: It makes it very comfortable for you. And you still volunteer at the hospital even though you have a problem with your legs?

C: Yes! I volunteer at St. Joseph's Hospital. I've been there almost fifteen years now.

S: What do you do there?

C: Every Friday morning, I can't walk, but the head of the volunteers sends a car for me, and picks me up and brings me back. And I used to work all over the hospital. I did everything. Mostly visiting elderly people and interpreting for the newcomers that come from Greece. If they had a problem, the nurse, they're happy because there's someone

there to interpret for them. Now because I can't walk much, I sit at the desk and I do paper work. And I love it!

S: Do you?

C: Umhm.

S: You enjoy going to the hospital?

C: I love it, very much, yah.

S: Why, because you're doing for others?

C: That's it!

S: So it's not just doing for the Greek community, but you're doing for the Greek community at large.

C: That's right.

S: So as I pick out, you've been doing social work all your life?

C: All my life. My adult life, yes.

S: Well even as a child because you helped to interpret for your mother, (C: ya, ya) when necessary. Well that's very interesting. Is there anything else you can think of that would be of interest? No?

C: I don't know. What could we...

S: All right, we'll just stop it for awhile and think about it. All right Cornelia, you want to talk about the festival that the church puts on?

C: Yes. Every two years we have a festival in our church, outside in the parking lot. They put up huge tents. They have food, Greek food, pastries, games for the children. They have a bar, dancing. There's a band every (--) They had, last time they had three bands. Whether it rains or shines, you're under the tents. And in the church they have all the hand-made articles.

S: In the basement of the church?

C: Yes. And religious icons. And then Father John, of course, has a tour every, I don't know if it's every hour, or every other hour. He takes them into the church and explains all the different icons. There's (--)

S: So people get the opportunity to see a Greek church that way.

C: Yes, and understand the meaning of what it is. And then they have a raffle, they have quilts. The ladies have made, hand-made, all hand-made quilts, crocheted articles, paintings. You name it, they have it.

S: Umhm. This is what you do Tuesday mornings at your workshops?

C: On Tuesdays the ladies, on Tuesday morning prepare all this.

S: Umhm.

C: And the next festival will be in 1987, next year. So they're really working hard.

S: And that's opened to all?

C: Opened to the public. We had 70,000 people. Over 70,000 people the last festival in the three days that they run this.

S: And what kind of food do they serve?

C: Greek food.

S: What, what do you call Greek food?

C: Well they have pilaf, (dolmatis?), they have (Pastichio?), Pita.

S: Do they have meat?

C: Meat, shishkabob, hotdogs, hamburgers if they want.

S: [Laughs] For those who don't eat Greek food?

C: Pastries, pastries, pastries! They're bringing them in. The ladies are bringing them in, every little while they're bringing them in.

S: Umhm. And everything gets sold?

C: Always.

S: And how long does this festival last?

C: Three days. Three days.

S: And it will be in 1987?

C: 1987.

S: In June?

C: Yes.

S: Is that the beginning of June that they have it?

C: Usually, yah. The first week, I think. Unless they change. But it's always the beginning, yah.

S: Umhm. So if anybody wants to see the Greek community that's the time to see it?

C: That's right.

S: See them in action.

C: All of Lowell, all of Lowell. They come from as far (--)

Tape shuts off and begins again with Cornelia

C: Flyers, then they show it on TV. They advertise it on TV.

S: Do they have any Greek dancing?

C: Greek dancing, always.

S: Do they dance in costumes? Do they wear costumes?

C: Yes, they have costumes. They had the group that dances. They call them, the dancers that dance and perform. And then everybody joins in. They have a wonderful time.

S: Umhm.

C: You can sit under the tent and eat and see the people dancing.

S: Umhm. This festival goes on between your apartment house and the church?

C: Right.

S: So you can look out your window and see the activities going on.

C: Umhm. But I don't sit and watch. I'm there. [Laughs] Yah, I'm there.

S: I see. All right, is there anything else, or you think that would be it?

C: Yah, I think so. I can't think of anything else.

S: That was a very good interview and I thank you very much.

C: You're welcome.

S: Cornelia Chiklis just completed her narration of Growing up in Lowell in the Greek Community. The date is January 16th, 1986. And Cornelia wants to let people know that her children went to college, as many of her nieces and nephews did. Her daughter is a teacher in the public schools, and her son is an interior decorator with his own business. This is Sylvia Contover, the interviewer signing off.

End of Interview